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Bobby for 12m

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rochelle estrin  
arline meyer



indonesian

art

# background

Few regions of the earth can rival Indonesia in its wide diversity of cultures. They range from those of the primitive hunters of Borneo and Sumatra to the highly sophisticated civilizations of the Javanese, Balinese, Sundanese, and Malays. No other country affords us quite the varied and contrasting view of the arts that we are offered by Indonesia. Even calling it a country, which implies a geographical unit, seems inaccurate. Indonesia is a spray of several thousand large and small islands (the former being few and the latter many) and minor archipelagos within major ones, all straddling the equator almost equidistantly to the North and South and connecting continental Asia with Australia.

Through the centuries, waves of immigrants came to Indonesia—first, in prehistoric times from eastern Asia by way of the Malay Peninsula, later by sea from India. They established their cultures on the islands, developing them and adapting them to the new surroundings, yet retaining their essentials with great conservatism. Although in some parts of the Archipelago the earlier civilizations were supplanted or overlayed by those who came later, there are still many regions in the interiors of Sumatra, Borneo, and the Celebes, as well as many of the smaller islands, where the aboriginal cultures have survived. The art of Indonesia is the twofold product of the aboriginal cultures and the highly cultivated civilizations of Java and Bali.

The earliest Indian immigrants on the island of Java settled from the first to the sixth century A.D. in the western part, and were followed, during the seventh and eighth centuries, by a second wave, which arrived in Middle Java and still further east. The influence from the Indian mainland was assimilated and integrated with the existing culture, which was based on an animistic cult of ancestor worship, and succeeded in producing the Hindu-Javanese civilization that fully burgeoned in the thirteenth century.

Before Hindu influence reached the island of Bali, just east of Java, Balinese culture was shaped predominantly by ancestor worship. The living were protected by the souls of departed ancestors who were supposedly dwelling in the mountains and at the source of rivers. These ancestors had established all the traditions, and their spirits were in control of the magical life forces necessary for human welfare.























In the eighth century Bali came under the rule of the Javanese kingdom, which was the chief power at that time throughout much of Indonesia. During the tenth century the domain of the Javanese kingdom diminished, and there arose in Bali, as a reflex, an independent royal dynasty which fell again to Java at the end of the century. In the eleventh century Bali regained its independence, and though Java tried repeatedly to subjugate the smaller island, it was successful only for brief periods. Ultimately Islam invaded Java; but never Bali. The island was conquered only in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries by the Dutch. In 1945, all of the Indonesian islands were consolidated into a republic when they wrested national independence from the Dutch.

Traces of the earliest Indonesian cultures can still be found among the Batak peoples of East Sumatra, the Dayaks of Borneo, and the natives of Nias and Leti. The aboriginal art style, rich in the magic symbols of animistic rites influenced the art of Oceania, particularly that of New Guinea. The primitive motifs are also closely linked with the art of the more sophisticated Indonesian civilizations.

The art of Java is based on Hindu style coupled with a native genius for transforming the forms of the island's plant and animal world into fantastic ornaments with magnificent spiral and curvilinear designs. The mark of Hindu culture is most notable in the dance and the theatre of Java.

In the eighth century a distinctive Hindu-Indonesian style began to emerge on the island of Bali. This art represented a compromise which was based on mutual concessions, and revealed a vital fusion of elaborate Hindu forms with the grotesque motifs of the Balinese. In the thirteenth century there was a resurgence of the animistic cult, with Balinese motifs gradually overshadowing the Hindu. This art has its roots in the ethnic traits of the Indonesians, and in the primitive ghost- and demon-ridden religion of the island's past. Indian patterns are completely absorbed in the native taste for the frightening, grotesque, and demonic. The mosaic snake and mythological beast are in the style of this late period. The deep carving of the hybrid animal is executed with the virtuosity of a fluent handwriting, producing bold effects through decisive hollows, sharp ridges, and dramatic profiles. The vigorous movement of this wood carving has been realized through an art of bold and expressive outline that is strongly reminiscent of the two-dimensional art of the Javanese shadow play.

The music, dance, drama, and visual arts of the advanced Indonesian cultures are an integral part of a single art known as the *wayang*. Designed originally for the purpose of summoning back into the world the shadows or souls of departed ancestors, the *wayang* developed into a unique and elaborate form of puppet theatre. The *wayang purwa* has been known in Java since the first half of the eleventh century. It takes its themes from Hindu epics and Javanese legends with their lively casts of gods, heroes, demons, wizards, and animals. The puppets are cut from dried buffalo hides, chiselled in intricate filigree patterns, and colorfully painted. Their bodies resemble bizarre and fanciful ornaments, in which a magical spirit is ever present. The figures are represented in sharp profile, with large noses and hair conventionalized in tail-like or spiral forms. Performance of the *wayang purwa* begins at dusk and continues until dawn. The *dalang* or puppeteer recites the tale as he manipulates the figures in a manner suggestive of the emotions evoked by his story. The drama is played against a large cloth screen with the shadows of the figures thrown against the screen by a flaring brass oil lamp in the shape of a *garuda* bird, the mythical steed of the Hindu God Vishnu. Traditionally, the men sit in front of the screen and the women behind it, viewing the *wayang* as a shadow play. The nature of the plays is always romantic with strong religious elements. Giants stalk through a shadowy land, while wizards combat the forces of evil, or work in company with them. Without fail, but not until many battles have been fought, good triumphs over evil. The puppets in this Lilliputian world are as easily recognized as the heroes and villains of an American gangster film. The "good" puppets are finely drawn with sharp noses and almond-shaped eyes, while the "bad" ones appear gross with bulging eyes and bulbous noses. These performances are always accompanied by a *gamelan* orchestra composed mainly of percussion instruments.



wayang









The *wayang golek* is closely related to a "Punch and Judy" show or our own marionette theatre. The puppets are three-dimensional, hewn from soft wood, and elaborately attired in sarongs and tunics of native textiles. Less ceremonial than the *wayang purwa*, *wayang golek* plays are performed during the day and relate the sagas of heroes from fourteenth-century Hindu kingdoms rather than mythological legends.

Later forms of this art are the *wayang topeng* and the *wayang wong*. In the former, masked figures act out the parts while the *dalang* recites the lines and explains the acts. In the *wayang wong*, the actors speak their own parts and execute the dance by graceful posturing and gestures that simulate the movements of the shadow figures. Their masks are similar to the heads of the *wayang golek* puppets.

Throughout Indonesia, the dance is used to illustrate ancient legends or as part of religious ceremonies; and as in the *wayang wong*, the dancer often dons a mask which identifies him with the god or personage he is portraying.







"Batik" is a Javanese word denoting a method of applying colored patterns or designs to finished fabrics. The design for each cloth is outlined in molten wax and the cloth is dipped in a color made from natural vegetable dyes. Only those portions which have not been covered in wax are affected. The wax is then removed and the same process repeated for each color used in the pattern. The wax design is laid on the fabric with aid of a special tool, the *tjanting*. An ancient Javanese riddle runs as follows:

"It has the calyx of a flower,  
The beak of a bird of prey,  
Five follow it across the white field,  
And it leaves traces of blood everywhere."

The "five" are the fingers handling the *tjanting*, the white field is the fabric to be decorated, and the "calyx" means the small receptacle containing the liquid wax, which flows on to the cloth through a tiny, bent nozzle (the "beak").

Javanese batik includes an innumerable variety of designs, a thousand of which are said to be exactly identified. The characteristic ornament of the illustrated one includes the ancient religious symbol of the three-branched tree of life and the *semen* pattern of plants, leaves, flowers, and conventionalized *garuda* birds, evenly spaced and covering the whole surface of the cloth, with additional smaller and finer designs filling the background.

Among the magnificent textile products of Indonesia, the *ikat* cloths are outstanding. The *ikat* or "tie and die" technique of weaving begins with the stretching of the warp or woof on a bamboo or wooden frame. For each color dye, those threads not to be dyed are tied off with plant fibers. The dye sometimes runs slightly into those threads, giving the finished pattern a soft fluid quality. Additional decorations are applied by weaving or embroidering silver or gold threads in the borders of the cloth. These textiles are used not only for clothing but serve as decoration on festive occasions or even as shrouds in which to bury the dead. The *ikat* cloths of the Dayaks of Borneo and those from the island of Sumba (lesser Sunda Islands) are particularly noteworthy. The former are patterned with highly stylized figures of men, animals and plants. Those from Sumba show figures of men, horses, deer, serpents and fish, as well as rows of stylized trees with human heads.

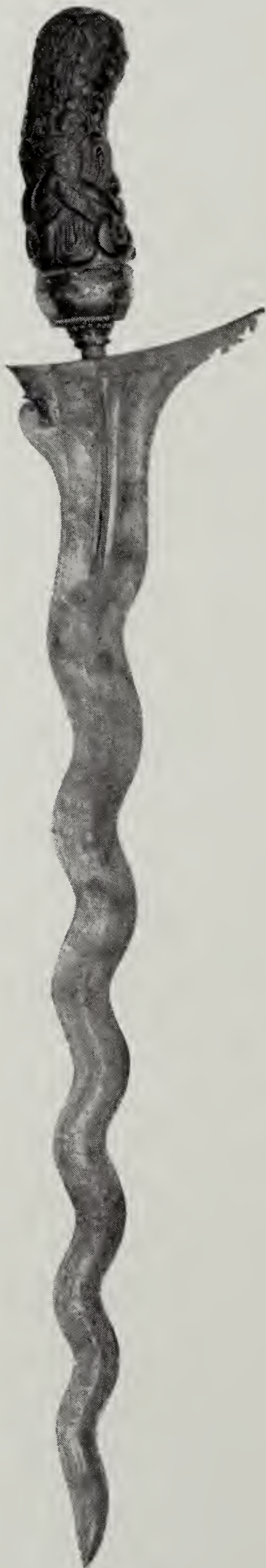








the





# kris

The best-known weapon of the Indonesians is the *kris*. An important part of ceremonial costumes and a frequent accessory in the *wayang* plays, the manner in which a *kris* may be worn is determined by strict etiquette and touches intimately the traditions, religion, and mores of the Indonesians. In war, three krisses were carried—one that the warrior considered his own, one a family heirloom, and one presented to him by his father-in-law. In Java, if a bridegroom could not be present at the wedding ceremony his *kris* was sent as proxy.

The *kris* blade, made of iron and iron-nickel alloy, is either straight or serpentine, and is often treated with chemicals to show differences in the colors of the metals, thus creating a design on the blade itself. Often the handle of the weapon is carved in the shape of a *garuda* or fashioned from metal to represent a Hindu deity. The sheath is called a *sarung* and is usually made of wood.



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## ancestor figures

The earliest art style of Indonesia was monumental and sculptural, devoted to sacrificial ceremonies and the commemoration of ancestors. We still find evidence of this art on the island of Nias, slightly south of Sumatra, where portrait statues of deceased persons are carved to serve as dwelling places for the souls of the departed spirits. These are strictly frontal, highly stylized, and usually placed on shelves inside the Nias houses. Ancestor worship is deeply imbued in the lives of the Nias people, and although the spirits of the dead have a place away from the earth, they appear to spend considerable time in the local villages. On moonlit nights they are thought to sit with the natives on stone seats, while warriors sing of the full moon that affords them images of their celebrated forefathers.

In the eastern part of the archipelago on the island of Leti, similar ancestor images are usually placed upon the roof beams of the family dwellings, where they are worshipped by the relatives of the deceased. The inhabitants of the South West islands also worship gods and ancestors of a more general nature, such as the founder of the village and the "Lord of the Soil."

The wood sculpture from these islands bears witness to the link that exists between the primitive Indonesian islands and the art of Oceania.





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	Accession No.
71 x 17.5 cm.	39.420
82.5 x 70 cm.	58.106
32.5 x 22 cm.	00.157
32.5 x 22 cm.	34.68
63 x 12 cm.	23.251
16 x 14 cm.	34.36
59 x 8 cm.	X500
59 x 39 cm.	30.1171
278 x 208 cm.	30.1114
241 x 208 cm.	24.272
55 x 9.5 cm.	25.645
48.5 x 9 cm.	35.2076
8.8 x 2.4 cm.	45.50-4 A
9.4 x 5 cm.	45.50-4 B
58 x 13 cm.	34.6073
58.7 x 13 cm.	42.338

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Height precedes width.

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